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ABSTRACT

Even though usually no one wants a strike in the schools, the trend during the last decade has been toward greater union activity on behalf of teachers, administrators, and other groups involved with the schools. The inevitable result has been an increase in the number not only of teacher strikes, but of administrator strikes as well. But usually the principals do not strike with the teachers, unless their own union is strong, as is the case in most large city school districts. During a strike, the building principal frequently is the administrator under the most pressure to keep things cool, especially if he or she is charged with keeping the school open while the teachers are out. The principal should remember that the health, safety, and welfare of the students come first. He should try to maintain good relations with the striking teachers and should not give cause for future teacher complaints, since everyone must work together again after the strike is over. (Author/DS)

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PREPARING FOR A STRIKE AND LIVING WITH IT AFTER IT HAPPENS

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(Speech Delivered at National Association of Secondary School Principals, New Orleans, Louisiana, January 15 and 17, 1977)

S*T*R*I*K*E - This is a word that was undoubtedly not in the lexicon of the average educational practitioner in the early years of the so-called "fabulous fifties", but which by the end of the "sizzling sixties" and now the "swinging seventies" has become an almost annual occurance in the American school system.

Today, it has reached the point where not only teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, including custodial, maintenance, food service, transportation personnel, reserve the right to strike if demands aren't met, but even students have used this device to achieve demands in some instances.

Implicit in all of these branches of the educational segment are the legalities that all have the right to organize; have the right to designate a majority representative, have an organizational security provision such as a union or closed shop; have a dues check-off system; have a grievance procedure ordinarily terminating in binding arbitration; the right to bargain and sign an enforceable agreement; the right to strike if just demands are not met.

The field has become so broad that it would be beyond the purview of this meeting today to treat all segments of this involved problem, so only two aspects will be considered, namely, the role of the administrator in administrator strikes and in teacher strikes.

One thing is certain as Albert W. Panaci pointed out in his address to the NASSP Convention in 1975 in Las Vegas, Nevada, and that is basically no one wants a strike, particularly in schools. School administrators don't want strikes.

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School boards want to avoid the public distress and student badgering. The general public has shown its growing impatience with strikes that affect schools. Teachers basically don't want to hit the bricks. Even students who may feel pleased in the fall that school will be late in opening are among the first to picket the strikers, when they realize they may have to make up the missed time or jeopardize college entrance and entry into the world of work if they cannot graduate on time.

Let us, however, for the sake of discussion assume that a strike has been called by either the administrators or teachers or both in a given school district. Bargaining sessions have yielded no workable agreement; negotiations have stopped; notice to strike has been given and the picket lines are set up and the strike, itself, is on.

Let us further assume that the administrators have decided to go out with or without the teachers in a given school situation. This may take the form of the New York City situation where the administrators, divided among several union groups, went on strike at the same time the teachers also struck. It may take the form of the administrators remaining on their jobs while say the teachers strike as in the Detroit situation in 1973 with the administrators only agreeing to stay on the job after consultation with the teacher union who requested them to do so. Or it may take the position of the administrators agreeing with the striking teachers, but remaining neutral since they are on 52-week yearly contract and get paid whether the teachers work or not. Thus, a teacher strike has little or no effect upon them in terms of administrative salary reductions as their full benefits continue regardless of how long the teachers refrain from working.

Assuming that the local administrators are organized into either a union group or some administrative association, which group in turn calls a strike, it is surely a matter of individual principal conscience as to whether he or she joins the walkout. For inherent in the right to strike is also the right not to strike.

However, it would be difficult to imagine the position a non-striking principal would find himself or herself in if all others in a given school district walked out.

In the case of a teacher strike it is to be presumed that in most cases the local building administrators will be expected to report to work by the local board of education, for it is only in the largest city situations such as New York, Chicago and similar great cities that the principals are so strongly organized that they can or will call a strike. It should be pointed out at this point in time, though, more and more principals in the great cities are organizing into one strong national union body which has been chartered by the AFL-CIO as the American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA) with headquarters in New York City and currently embracing 60 local with more than 12,000 administrative members ranging from Boston and New York on the East Coast through Detroit and Kansas City in the Mid-West to San Francisco on the West Coast.

As Martin Kalish, former President, Detroit Organization of Supervisors and Administrators, and currently Secretary-Treasurer of AFSA, reported to this speaker in a recent personal interview, "There is a new era developing between organized union administrators and organized school teachers. The presidents of both the AFSA and the AFT sit on the Executive Board of the American Federation of Labor and thus have direct access to one another. It can easily be predicted that in those situations such as Detroit and New York, for example, that any future strikes will be mutually cleared with the respective organizations before being called."

Furthermore, Mr. Kalish pointed out that the unionization of administrators has given them a new clout which may negate the need for striking. Example, 17 administrators in a large mid-western city were recently to be terminated or demoted. A call to him from the organized union administrators prompted him, in

turn, to call George Meany's office in New York. He was given the name of a party in an adjoining state who was on first-name terms with the Superintendent of the city where the firings were being contemplated. A phone call from the state representative to the superintendent rescinded the firings, Mr Kalish pointed out.

Mr. Kalish's prediction for the future of strikes among administrators and teachers is interesting in that he sees more and more administrators joining teachers in walking out when either or both groups call work stoppages. Administrators and teachers are discovering that they are not enemies. They have a commonality of interests in working together. They are realizing that they must unite and remain together to get their demands from the local board of education who, in turn, represent the general taxpaying public.

The AFSA will not attempt to organize in any school system in which less than 25 eligible administrators are employed. Thus, the smaller school system and the often only two or three local principals will probably not participate in strike actions as administrators. The strike for administrators is still undoubtedly only the province of the larger school systems.

Let us now assume that the local teachers in a given school system have called a strike and the principals have either not been asked to strike, will not strike, cannot strike under existing state laws, or have other reasons for not wishing to join the teachers in their protest. What should be their posture?

First of all, the health, safety and welfare of pupils under the supervision of any local school building administrator should come first. If the teachers are out, the local school board and top administration such as the superintendent must decide whether to open school or not, if, for example, it is a fall situation. Labor leaders would advise leaving the schools closed, keeping the principals out and off the payroll along with the teachers, but if they open the schools do not expect a small administrative staff to try and teach classes as is sometimes done utilizing parental or para-professional help. Naturally, if more than 50%

of the students do come to school, they must be accomodated, but, generally speaking, forcing principals to hold classes with teachers out or with classes taught by hastily recruited teachers classified as strike breakers and scabs by those on the picket line, as is too often done, places the administrator in an untenable position when the regulars report back to work.

It must be noted, however, that some school boards as in the Crestwood District Situation in my own State of Michigan fired some 169 striking teachers, had to take them back temporarily after hiring a new staff, appealing this to the courts and being upheld so that they were able to fire the strikers after giving each a quick individual hearing. In Michigan, as in many states, strikes by public employees, including educators, are forbidden by law, but when 12,000 teachers walk out as they did in Detroit in 1973 it is difficult to fire them since there are not that many available teachers on short notice to carry on if all strikers were fired.

Thus, although some authorities feel that principals should not work if teachers are out, the local situation is the determining factor. In Michigan, for example, in order to qualify for State school aid students must be in session for 180 days. When teachers were out for about seven weeks in 1973 the time had to be made up by extending the school year into July '74. Since Detroit administrators are on the same work schedule as teachers, namely 39-40 weeks, and since they had been required to report to work during most of the time the teachers were out, they were paid extra when the time was made up. This did not sit well with the teachers who felt that although they had agreed to this arrangement and had recommended to OSAS that principals report to work to preserve building safety that when their extra money was paid this was unfair.

A somewhat similar situation occurred in Philadelphia when during a teacher strike, principals conducted classes for 12th graders for graduation purposes.

It ruined relationships with the Union who considered the administrators strike breakers. Thus, school boards requiring administrators to teach classes during teacher strikes jeopardize the relationships between the groups after settlement.

There are other decisions that administrators must make if there is a strike. Do they cross teacher picket lines? Do they allow teachers to use the building and its facilities if they are on strike?

In this latter regard it is interesting to note that in a recent personal interview with Mrs. Mary Ellen Riordan, dynamic President, Detroit Federation of Teachers, she pointed out that in the Detroit strike of 1973 one building principal endeared himself to his staff by placing a phone on the open window, for it was September, for use for teacher emergency calls, and placed a chair outside for them to sit on. A simple gesture, as Mary Ellen pointed out, but one still fondly remembered by that particular building staff.

Many a principal, I recall as one who has been in two Detroit strikes, furnished a coffee pot, doughnuts, sandwiches, snacks and even went out on the street to socialize with the pickets alleviating the tensions that might develop.

As Mrs. Riordon said, however, the principal has a job to do and must do it. Treat the staff like human beings whether striking or not and things will work out afterwards, for the fall out is long lived.

In one Detroit school not all of the staff joined the strikers. Some few teachers continued to report. These were classified as scabs by the strikers and had this epithet scrawled in crayon on the windshields of their cars in the parking lot. Three years have passed, but the hard feelings and the animosities linger on.

Dr. Alfred Meyers, Assistant Superintendent, Detroit Public Schools, who was also interviewed in the preparation of this speech pointed out that principals must be on guard against being used by contending forces who may attempt to exploit them in game playing. They must be impartial. They must

try to establish mutual trust. If staff is treated decently and humanely, things work out in the end for kids. Administrators should not give cause for future teacher complaints, if at all possible, for all must work together after the work stoppage to help put the pieces back together again. Dr. Meyers further pointed out that local building principals must be kept informed by higher administration such as the superintendent as to what is happening at higher levels as they are on the firing lines and will have to administer whatever final agreement is hammered out between the teachers and the board of education.

Principals must always remember that, in general, they probably get what the teachers get in the long run or get some proportional arrangement so that they have this in common that basically they bargain together whether both or one is on strike.

As Al Meyers pointed out, strikes should be avoided, if possible, a point on which most educators agree. However, they will and do happen. As Panaci has indicated, strikes should be conducted without vicious, uncalled for threats and intimidation. Strikers and non-strikers alike must recognize that eventually they will be required to work together, side by side, as all strikes have an ending point. He further advises all parties involved to remain cool, if possible, and to remember that whatever the result of the strike, it is the welfare of the students that is the final heart of the matter.

Pupil and building security must be maintained. Acts of vandalism and intimidations must be handled even if police have to be included. Howeve, if common sense prevails and all participants act as intelligently as possible, the educational ship may weather the storm and the prize that all sought may be truly won.